

Pregnancy

Pregnancy

Pregnancy is the time period in which a baby develops inside a women, usually as a result of sexual intercourse. The baby are usually born at around 40 weeks (9 months) after your last menstrual period.

Some early symptoms of pregnancy include:

- missed periods
- tender breasts
- nausea and vomiting
- Hunger & Frequent urination

There are also various symptoms that you will experience throughout or later in pregnancy. These symptoms can cause some discomfort. They are however normal and nothing to worry about. When the symptoms become severe, you should see your doctor. These symptoms may include the following:

- Tiredness
- Morning sickness
- Constipation
- Pain around your hip area & Backache
- Back pain
- Occasional, irregular, and often painless contractions that occur several times per day.
- Swelling of your legs
- Low blood pressure (especially when lying on your back) – this can be relieved by lying on your side (always sleep on your side)
- Increased urinary frequency
- Swollen veins in the anal area
- Heartburn & nausea
- Stretch marks & Skin darkening
- Breast tenderness
- Frequent urination

Pregnancy test

Pregnancy can be confirmed with a pregnancy test at around 12 to 15 days after conception. Pregnancy tests typically tests the presence of a certain hormone in your urine. Pregnancy tests are available at any pharmacy or clinic. Blood pregnancy tests can also be done. They are more accurate than urine pregnancy tests.



When to visit the doctor during pregnancy

It is essential to see the doctor for regular check-ups when you are pregnant to ensure that you are healthy and that your baby are growing and developing normally. The doctor should be visited on the following occasions:

- After you have missed 2 periods
- 2 weeks after your first visit – only if recommended by your doctor
- On 28 weeks of gestation
- On 34 weeks of gestation
- On 41 weeks of gestation – if your baby has not yet been born yet. This visit is extremely important, seeing that your baby may be disadvantaged if he/she are delivered after 42 weeks of gestation.
- Whenever you experience any of the 'danger signs, listed below
- When your water breaks
- When you feel like you are in labour
- Whenever something seems wrong with the baby

Care of the baby before birth

There are some measures that can be taken before the baby is born to improve positive outcomes of the pregnancy and prevent complications. These include the following:

- taking folic acid or eating food with a high folic acid content, such as green leafy vegetables and citrus.
- avoiding all forms of drugs and alcohol
- doing regular exercise

It is also extremely important to not use any medication during pregnancy, that has not been prescribed by your doctor. Certain medication can have a negative affect on your baby!

Weight gain during pregnancy

The amount of healthy weight gain during a pregnancy varies. Most weight gain only occurs later in pregnancy. The following are guidelines of healthy weight gain during a pregnancy with only one child: (Please see page 91 to define your weight category)

- Normal body weight women – 11.3-15.9 kg weight gain
- Underweight - 12.7–18 kg weight gain
- Overweight - 6.8–11.3 kg weight gain
- Obese - 5–9 kg weight gain



Excessive or insufficient weight gain during pregnancy can compromise the health of the mother and the baby. Being or becoming overweight during pregnancy can lead to various complications, such as: cesarean section delivery, high blood pressure, developing diabetes and having an overweight baby. It is therefore important to be mindful of your weight during pregnancy. Eating a healthy diet and doing regular medium intensity exercises are the best way to stay healthy during your pregnancy.

Nutrition

Always be mindful of what you take into your body during pregnancy. You are the one that are keeping your baby alive. Whatever you ingest, the baby will mostly also ingest. The mother provides various nutrients and oxygen to the baby, through the umbilical cord. She also receives various waste products from the baby through the cord. The intake of a healthy and balanced diet are extremely important to help with the healthy growth of the baby.

If you ingest toxins, like alcohol, it will have a dangerous effect on your baby! Here are a few toxins and the effects that it can have on your baby:

- Alcohol – Can lead to mental retardation of your baby. AVOID completely!
- Cigarette smoking – Increases the risk of preterm labour, which can lead to various complications when it comes to your baby.
- Cocaine and other drugs – Lead to premature birth, birth defects and a baby with attention problems (like ADHD).

Exercise

Regular aerobic exercise and participation in activities during pregnancy are recommended. It will not only improve your physical wellness, but your mental wellness will improve as well. Bedrest during pregnancy are usually not recommended. There are however various situations in which you should speak to your doctor before exercising. These are: vaginal bleeding, shortness of breath before starting the activity, dizziness, headache, chest pain, muscle weakness, decreased movement of your baby, fluid leakage from your vagina and calf pain or swelling.

Sexual activity during pregnancy

Sexual activity during pregnancy is a low risk behaviour. Sexual activity can be continued during pregnancy except when your doctor advice against it, due to a certain medical condition.



Medical imaging during pregnancy

MRI and ultrasound imaging are not considered dangerous to the mother or the baby. X-ray imaging and nuclear medicine imaging can however be harmful to the mother and the baby if it is administered in high dosages.

Danger Signs

There are various danger signs during pregnancy that can indicate a possible disease process. It is extremely important to see a doctor as soon as possible when you experience some of the following symptoms:

- Vaginal bleeding
- Continuous severe abdominal pain
- Reduced movements of your baby
- Continuous headache with light flashes in front of your eyes & sudden onset of swelling of your hands and feet

Complications

Although pregnancy are usually safe with minimal problems, the decision to fall pregnant should not be taken lightly. Pregnancy can lead to various complications. The aim of various lifestyle changes during pregnancy (as discussed above) are to decrease the risk of having complications. Examples of some complications are:

- Bleeding
- Infections
- High blood pressure
- Miscarriage
- Excessive nausea and vomiting
- The development of diabetes

Legal protection of pregnant women in the workplace

According to South Africa's 'Basic Conditions of Employment Act' (BCEA), female pregnant employees have the right to four consecutive months' unpaid maternity leave. An employee may take maternity leave any time from 4 weeks prior to the expected date of birth, or on a date determined by a doctor. No employee may work for 6 weeks after the baby is born, unless a doctor certifies the employee fit to resume her duties. Employers should be informed in writing on when the employee intend to take the maternity leave and when they will be back at work.



The 'Labour Relations Act' furthermore protects pregnant employees against discrimination or dismissal from work. It is illegal to dismiss a pregnant employee on account of her pregnancy, intended pregnancy, or any reason related to her pregnancy.

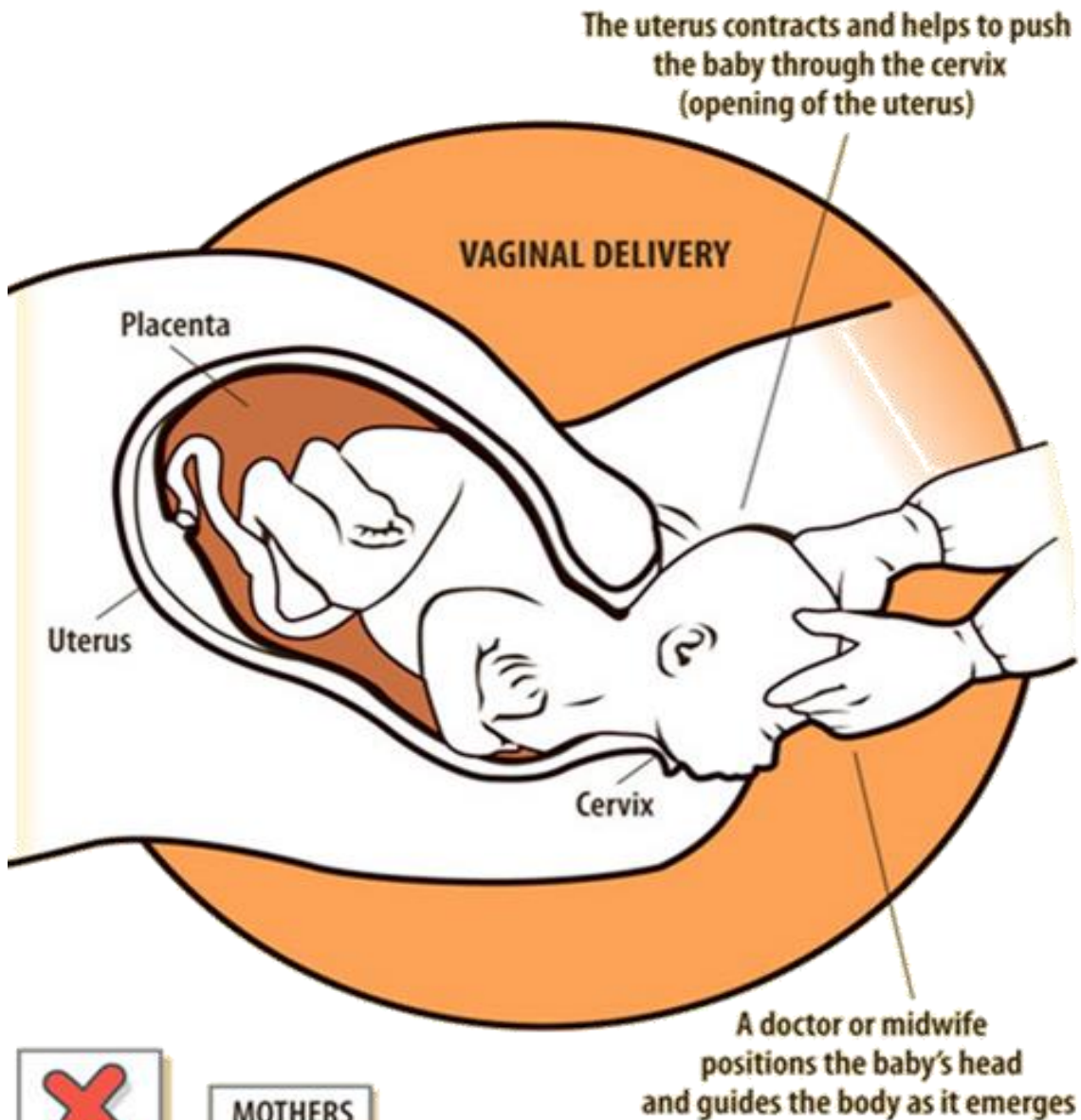
If your employer do not oblige to any of these laws, help can be found at the 'Legal Aid Advice Helpline' – 0800 110 110 (National helpline, 7am-7pm, Monday to Friday)

Labour

A women is considered to be in labour when she experience regular uterine contractions and cervical changes. The preferred route of giving birth is by vaginal delivery. Complications will however require a cesarean section delivery.

Vaginal Delivery vs Caesarian Section





MOTHERS

- 1 Women may have difficulty controlling their bladder or bowels after giving birth
- 2 They may also experience lingering pain in the perineum, the area between the vagina and the anus

BABIES

- 1 Newborn babies may experience asphyxia, when the baby is deprived of oxygen, which can cause suffocation, organ damage or death from a delayed delivery
- 2 There are higher possibilities of mothers transmitting viruses such as the human papillomavirus (HPV), the hepatitis B virus and other sexually transmitted viruses and bacteria



CAESAREAN SECTION



MOTHERS

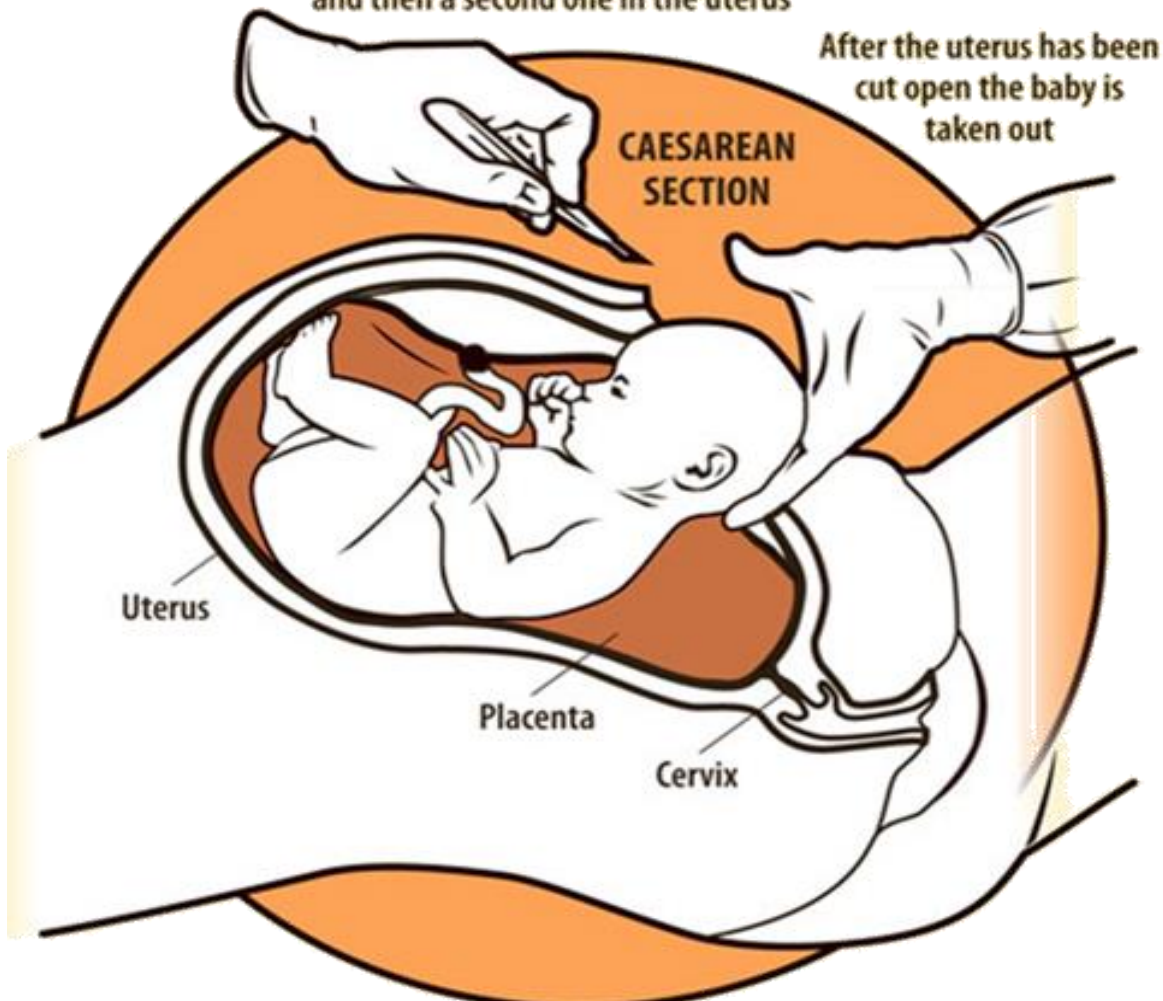
- 1** Women can plan when they give birth and control the pain experienced to a great extent
- 2** Women who have Caesarean sections are less likely to have urinary incontinence (the loss of bladder control)

BABIES

- 1** HIV-positive mothers are less likely to pass on the virus to their babies
- 2** Babies are less likely to experience birth trauma, such as not getting enough oxygen

A surgeon first makes a cut in the abdomen and then a second one in the uterus

After the uterus has been cut open the baby is taken out




Cons

MOTHERS

- 1 A Caesarean section is major surgery so recovery time is longer, which extends a mother's stay in hospital
- 2 There is a risk of uterine rupture. Most women's bodies can't sustain an endless number of Caesarean sections, so C-sections often limit the number of children a woman can have

BABIES

- 1 Babies born by elective C-sections are more likely to develop breathing problems such as abnormally fast breathing during the first few days after birth
- 2 Surgical injuries are rare, but accidental cuts to the baby's skin can occur during delivery

Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is one of the most important parts of ensuring adequate development in the first few months of your baby's life. Unless a doctor tells you to specifically not breastfeed, it is best for your baby if you breastfeed for up to at least 1 or 2 years of age. At 6 months, you have to start feeding your baby breastmilk with some other foods. Ask a doctor or nurse about breastfeeding if you have a baby. They will be able to answer all your questions.

It is furthermore normal to have an absence of menstruation when you are fully breastfeeding your baby. Menstruation will return when you stop breastfeeding. You should however note that the absence of menstruation does not mean that you cannot fall pregnant. Contraceptives should be used while breastfeeding.

Family Planning

The use of contraceptives are extremely important when it comes to planning the size of your family. Children takes a lot of money and time, therefore you have to plan ahead and prevent yourself from falling pregnant if you do not have the money, energy or time to raise another child. A women can fall pregnant again as little as 4 to 6 weeks after giving birth. (See page 34-50 on family planning and contraceptives)

